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Graham, Linda Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Oral History Interview with
Linda Graham

Conducted June 23-24, 1997
by Ann Paeth

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
Interview with Linda Graham
June 23-24, 1997
Interviewer: Ann Paeth

AP: OK. The first thing I have you do is state your name, where and when you were born, and then if you could trace where you've been living, and when you came here.

LG: My name is Mary Linda Graham. I was born at _____ City Hospital, which is now defunct, in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, [date removed], 1958. I was raised in Champaign, I attended the National Academy of Arts, received my BFA in Theater, and my MFA in Dance/Performance Choreography from the University of Illinois. I went from there to Ohio where I worked with Dayton Contemporary Dance Company for a year. Then I moved to New York City, where I worked with lots of people that nobody's ever heard of for a little over a year. Then I went to Tennessee and did summer stock for six months. From Tennessee, I came to Holland, Michigan, where I have been since the fall of 1983. I never expected to stay here that long.

AP: Why didn't you, what did you expect, what happened?

LG: I was still on very much a career oriented path of performance and choreography, primarily. Although prior to this, I had been thinking I needed to get some teaching experience under my belt, because I had some serious injuries and I knew that I would not be able to perform very long. So I thought, well, I'll go there to Holland. I wanted to get back into the midwest. This was a good opportunity to do that, to have a steady income, to sort of stabilize myself, get myself a little grounded. My plan was to move to Chicago after a few years of living here. I met my husband, the

man who's now my ex-husband, got married, and stayed. Then I got divorced, but I'm still here. I have two children now.

AP: What brought you here?

LG: Maxine DeBruyn.

AP: How did she bring you here?

LG: Kate McGory, who's a good friend of mine, with whom I later started Aerial Dance Company, apparently was a student of mine at the University of Illinois when I was a grad student there, although I don't recall her. (laughs) But I had massive classes, too. So she had recommended me to Maxine, that's what she told me. I recall, indirectly, that Max had contacted me when I was graduating. Max needed an MFA person here. There were very few MFA programs at that time.

AP: You have been, for a long time, the only full-time prof here that has an MFA. Everybody else just has undergrad.

LG: I still am. Well, Terri does, but she's part-time. So I have a terminal degree. I hate that term. But I believe that was one reason I was hired, Max wanted to develop a major here. I think the administration here wanted somebody with a terminal degree. That was one of the big reasons why Max was checking that direction out. I don't all of know her reasons. All I know is that she contacted me at U of I. She called there, she talked to the secretary, and the secretary said I was the best MFA candidate graduating from there, and recommended me. Max said, OK, fine. She made the job here very appealing and all that, but I had just gotten a job at DCDC. So I said, why don't we stay in touch? And we did, we exchanged cards for several years, and

then they had an opening, I don't the circumstances, because I know Max hired other people. I came out, and I fully did not expect to get this job, because it was tenure track, and I had very little experience. They wanted somebody who could teach jazz, I had no experience doing that. I had performed jazz, but hadn't really taught jazz. I had taught ballet, I had a strong background in ballet, but I was always a modern performer and choreographer. I didn't know who else they were interviewing either. But it was a nice opportunity for me to sort of take a break, get out of New York, and get fed by somebody. I didn't have to pay for my own food for three days.

AP: What was the department and college like at that time.

LG: Very different, less paperwork. They installed all these computers for everybody saying they're going to reduce the paperwork, and I haven't seen it. The department itself has grown unbelievably. At that time we did not have a major. There was an emphasis in dance. I think people could graduate with a dance major, but it wasn't what it is now. The major got in there within several years, and shortly after that, we started having steady growth. Many of the classes that I started teaching here, like historical social dance had six people in the first class. Accompaniment for dance: the first class was six people. Now these classes have 32 people, which shows you the kind of growth that has happened within the department. It's a lot. As the department has grown, we've increased staff as we needed to, and trying to increase our space, and we're even working on increasing faculty more. It was very different, it was very small. Also, at that point, the only concert that was regularly held, was the annual spring concert. Occasionally, there would be informal student

presentations in the Dow studio, that were very, just what I said, informal. Lights up means, turn on the switch. Lights down means, turn off the switch. These were always very well attended. For those informal presentations, Aerial did works in progress, so you had a real mix. They were usually very short, like an hour, because there were six students who presented their choreography. Also, Aerial didn't exist, Contemporary Motions wasn't coming in. They always brought in a company with the Great Performance Series. So the Great Performance Series presented some kind of dance in the fall, the annual spring concert happened in the spring. And sometimes there was an informal student presentation with a very small number of students, six, seven. Now, we have Aerial doing two concerts a year, Contemporary Motions does one, the students present something every semester that is now two nights, with a ton of students, as well as the Annual Spring concert, as well as the Great Performance Series. It's not uncommon for us to have a guest, either. Seven to eight concerts a year are now presented.

AP: Plus now more, hopefully, alternative opportunities for students.

LG: Precisely, as well as alternative. We haven't really increased that much in our faculty, and none in our space. So the load has changed, which is why we're looking for more space and faculty. The growth is good; this is just normal stuff from growing.

AP: What was it like coming into this community when you first came here?

LG: My brother said it was from the Big Apple to the road apple. Example: it used to be on Sundays, my Sunday ritual was to make a pitcher of mimosas with my roommates in New York, and we would sit around and do the New York Times crossword

puzzle. So when I got here, I made a small pitcher of mimosa, found a place in town where I could get the New York Times on Sunday, got the puzzle, and I was loafing around the backyard in a swimsuit, drinking my mimosas and doing the puzzle, and the neighbors came out and stood there with their arms crossed, giving me that dower look. I looked at them and I waved, "Hi, I'm your new neighbor." They just turned around and walked inside. I realized later, much later, that their disdain was because I was out on Sunday in swimsuit--and it's a good thing they didn't know, they probably thought that was orange juice--doing a puzzle. Oops. So the cultural religious background of this community was terribly foreign to me. Although it is not unlike my tradition, English-Scottish Presbyterian. There are similarities. I think in the work ethic, the conservative approach to money--this is very similar, if not the same. So there's a lot that I really respect about the community. There are pros and cons. It's a very conservative community. I was coming here from New York, which is clearly a very urban society, to a community that was very new to dance as an acceptable art form. This was something that was totally new to me, to encounter a community where dance had been, very recently, held to be a sin. This is something I had read in books, and I understand in the abstract: "People used to, in the Middle Ages..." Here I was in a community where this belief was still held. Right now, I'm dating a man who grew up being told that dance was a sin. He snuck away to go to the Holland High School dances, where he said he just sort of stood there and chugged in place because he didn't know what to do, because he couldn't dance. Now we have this incredibly strong dance program here, which I think you've

got to credit Max with that, because she's the one that started this thing, and she's done so much education with the community, so here we have a department that has grown like this, in a place where, just prior to that, people weren't allowed to dance. That's amazing, that is amazing to me. That's a real education. Like I said, it was a foreign concept. It's one that still is; this is one reason why I don't feel like I'm from Holland, although I've been here for 14 years, it's still one that I encounter. When I say that I'm a dancer, people say, "You're at Hope." That's OK, I'm an educator, so we educate. Once people get open to the idea, they're very supportive of it.

AP: Do you think it's easier being attached to Hope, as well, to get that legitimacy?

LG: Absolutely. It's a respected institution. The education has been within Hope, too, of the administration and the students here. Conservatism can be a double edged sword. I don't know if that's the right expression. It can be both good and difficult. You have to convince them in very practical ways that this is beneficial. But once convinced of that, I think the community is very supportive. And they do it all out. They say, OK, we will do this, and they're very, very good about that, they don't dribble, so I like that. It's also clean. That's something that really impressed me when Max was first driving me into town, and she was driving like she always does. She went zinging around this corner and went, "Oh, that's the slum." I missed it. I'm from New York. Slum? I didn't see it. The community is also very interesting to me because of its cultural mix. We have a really large Hispanic population here, that has, in many respects, for a long time, stayed isolated. It's interesting how the

cultures co-exist. Again, there are good things and not so good things about those realms.

AP: Have you noticed the diversity changing since you've been here?

LG: Yes. A lot more Asian, larger Asian population, and some African American population coming in.

AP: When the gang violence situation started, what was your take on that? Did you notice anything?

LG: Yes, you started seeing graffiti, which is something I did not see when I first moved here. That saddened me. In New York, this was such a day to day thing. There's a part of me that says, yeah, gangs, here in Holland. But the other part is sad, because one of the beauties of this city, this town/city, and really it's sort of in between, has been it's clean, and you had people growing up who had a very strong work ethic, great appreciation for education. You still do, in the majority, but gangs pull in the other direction. That's a symptom of another social thing going on, and it's a symptom of our society as a whole, and it's here. So it's not totally unexpected, but it's something I hope the community continues to work to change.

AP: Has the student body changed? How?

LG: Yes. The student body is more conservative. Max even brought that up. I think that's because the college itself has taken a more conservative approach, religiously. In their religious affiliation, that tie has been deepened in certain ways that make it more evangelical. As that has happened, you see a change in the student body, too. It's not, necessarily, reflected in the faculty. Although the hiring is different. What I

have noticed, is still the new people coming in, I like a lot, they are not narrow minded. That's something I appreciate about the hiring. I was very concerned about that when the change started happening. I think they are more faith oriented, perhaps, but they're not narrow minded. I can handle that, because I have a strong personal faith, and it's something you work on all the time.

AP: Do you think there's a difference between how personal that is and how open, not open...

LG: Evangelical.

AP: Yes, I guess that is the best way to say it. Because I think a lot of people do have strong personal faiths, but it's just not something that pervades their everyday work...

LG: Every conversation. Yes. The students are much more prone to talk about their faith, where they are on it. I get concerned, because sometimes that is associated with a very narrow view, and an unquestioning view. I think to strengthen one's faith, you must question it, and sincerely question it, and test it. They seem neither interested in questioning it, or testing it, which makes for a superficial faith. There we have a dilemma as an educational institution. It's, I think, part of our job, to present them with, not that they have to learn anything from it or question, but to present them with the questions. Present them with the tests. I hope that is continued heartily.

AP: Has the diversity of the student body changed at all?

LG: For a while it was getting real diverse, and I have seen that trend reverse. That also saddens me. I think that's wrapped up with the more conservative and the more

evangelical nature of the general student body. But again, the community as a whole has gone the other direction, it's more diverse. I don't know if Hope can do a little more outreach to the community, or if they're even interested in doing that, but that would diversify the student body if they did that.

AP: I think not just in background and ethnicities, but in styles and...

LG: Right, it's gotten more homogenous. Again, generally whatever's going on in colleges and universities, it reflects the social trends as well. Speaking with my siblings, who operate in other academic institutions, what we're going thru here is not atypical.

AP: Really? Do you have any idea why that's happening?

LG: I don't know. Swing of the pendulum. So the focus of the school, it's got this RCA affiliation. When they told me they were affiliated with the RCA... See, my family's Presbyterian, I thought they meant the record company. I thought that was cool. I thought they probably had one heck of an endowment. (laughs) But since they've made more of that tie, I think they can attract, in general, the more conservative, evangelical. Not to say, necessarily, dumber, by any stretch. I think a lot of the students are smart. Smart, smart, smart, smart, smart. Very smart group. As dancers, as a whole, we've gotten extremely talented dancers. I couldn't be more pleased with the dance student body.

AP: I was going to ask you what you thought of the education you got to the education here. Of course, we would be comparing liberal arts school to a university.

LG: That's very difficult, it's almost impossible to compare. You're comparing a little

nectarine to a giant watermelon.

AP: What do you think, then, of the education Hope gives.

LG: I love the concept of liberal arts education. I really do. I didn't even know it existed. When I first got here, I didn't know schools this size existed. It's much more personal. The opportunities for mentoring, which I love, are there. University of Illinois, as an undergrad, I worked with the graduate students for my first two or three years. I did not even have professors until the latter part of my second year, I think it was. I appreciate my grad student teachers a lot. But the grad teachers were very good. One of them, from Mississippi, won a Pulitzer Prize. Beth Henley. She wrote The Wake of Jamey Foster, she wrote The Miss Firecracker Contest, she wrote Crimes of the Heart, and she was writing that stuff when I was there. She was good, I had her my freshman year. In a funny way, I learned more from my grad people than I did from my profs. We weren't even allowed to perform our first year there. Opportunities for creativity were completely non-existent, that was not even a possibility. Variation within the program was not a possibility. You could not mix, you couldn't do the combined fields that we can do here. The concept of a double major was an impossibility. You simply had to do this one thing, and if you don't do that one thing, you weren't there. We were in this conservatory program. I've always been curious in my mind set, and I've always liked to read about a lot of different things and explore different fields, so I think the opportunity within a liberal arts education to do that is phenomenal. I would like to go back to school here.

AP: Why do you still feel like you're not from Holland?

LG: Part of it has to do with the difference in my tradition. I think, also, some of my outlooks and my interests. I encounter it even with my neighbors. When I explain to them what I'm going to do with my yard, they look at me like I'm from Pluto.

AP: Do other people consider you to be from Holland, is that just you don't feel like it?

LG: I think part of it is also that I hang out a lot with people from the Hope College community, and we're a lot of imports. The man I date is from Holland, but he went to New Jersey just outside of New York for fifteen years. He's a nice mix. There's just an outlook that I hope I can instill in my children who are from Holland. What that is and what that means, I think, is changing as the community is, too. It's a great place to raise children. You've heard that so many thousands of times, but I don't worry about them, I don't have to anymore. Especially where we are now.

[Conclusion of interview on 6/23/97. Continuation of interview on 6/24/97 follows]

AP: I want to ask you about your new neighborhood out in Waukazoo Woods, and what that's like.

LG: I love it. I love this neighborhood. I call this fate, kismet, act of God, I don't know what you want to call it, at an extremely traumatized time in my life. Which, when you look back, you kind of go, how did I get through that? But I also know that at the time, I was just dealing with what I had to deal with day by day by day. A very traumatic, very frightening, in some respects, time. My children and I were living with a friend in her basement. I was dealing with an impending divorce and a soon to be ex-husband who was having serious mental and emotional problems, and a lot of this was directed at me. Within the circumstance, again, when you look back, you

go, it's understandable. Nonetheless, you have to protect yourself. He was coming up to my house. He was driving by Lynn's house, at that point, because we were living in her basement. I was in a quandary. He would not move out of our home. He said that I had to move back. Then he compromised, as far as he was concerned. He said, I'll move out for two weeks while you work this out, and then I'm moving back. To me this was not a viable thing, not a possibility. So I knew that I had to move, I had to find a new place. This was a week before the huge dance concert, right at which point I had left town for eight days. A lot of stuff piled up. The department was fabulous. The department took as much of the load, they said, we'll handle it, you do what you have to do. The school was great, the support I got from my place of employment, I have to thank you Hope College. I don't know how they've been with other people, I just know that in my circumstance, they really stood by the Christian principle of family priorities and helping one of their own. They were great, the department was great, the school was great. Nonetheless, there's things you have to do. Like, you have to show up for the performance, stuff like that. So it was a pressured time. Molly was also in the performance. She was such a trooper. She really got through it. And her father, John showed up, and this was a really rocky period of time. So I was looking for a place to live, and I had about one day to find it. I did not want to move into an apartment, I did not want to put my children into an apartment complex. I wanted my children to be in a house. They were used to being in a house. I wanted them to have a yard. I wanted them to be in a secure location. It had to be affordable. I had a very tight budget. Finances had

so much to do with the divorce, and they still are operating in my life and will for some time, although they're better than they were. I was walking around the neighborhood where Lynn lived, and it was a cloudy, awful day, and I was looking down and pondering what I was going to do and how I could do this. I looked up and there was this cottage with a For Rent sign in the window. It was literally around the corner from Lynn's house. I saw in the paper that it was going to have an open house, people could come through. So I went over with Lynn. I wanted to stay close to her. She was a real strong support system. I knew that if I needed a safe house momentarily, I needed to be close to one, and Lynn was a safe house for me. And the kids, someplace where I could take Molly and Jake and say, I have to go do this. So I needed to stay, I wanted to stay close to their kind of support system. Must have been a thousand people who looked at this cottage. This cottage is a little gray house on a double lot in Waukazoo Woods. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to afford it. It was a little more, like \$25 more per month, than I wanted to pay, but I could handle that. With all the other amenities, this was a very positive thing. So I got pushy with the landlord and offered him a deposit on the spot, which I didn't have the money to cover, I knew he wouldn't take it, but the offer let him know how serious I was, and that was the whole point. He wanted to check out my credit references and all this other stuff, which was fine. My credit was good, and still is good. He boiled it down to two people, two young women, and myself with the two kids. The two kids were a concern, because children tend to be hard on any property. But he looked at my profession, he looked at my circumstance, and he

decided to go with me. Really, finding that place, was an act of God. It put me in a neighborhood where we have found, when Hillary Clinton talks about the village raising the children, we're in a little village. It's an incredibly supportive neighborhood. The neighbors are not afraid to, if one of the kids is out of line, to say, hey, don't do that. Not necessarily discipline them, but point it out, bring it up with the other parents. There's a lot of cohesion within our little end of the block. Right on that end of the block, it's kind of a large block, now there are about 25 kids or more. I few more have moved into the neighborhood. Everybody knows everybody. There's a good deal of the, OK, I have to go to the hair dresser and this place and this place in the afternoon, can you watch Jacob and Allison? And tonight when you're at your dance class, I'll watch Molly and Jake. This is a win-win for the kids, because they're playing with their buddies, who they'd by playing with anyway, and you feel good that your children are with a responsible parent, someone you know who is responsible, who will watch them, who will take care of them. We do a lot of taking care of other kids, as if they were our own. There's this little boy who just moved into the neighborhood, and some of us have already decided we're going to talk to his parents. Not in a judgmental way, but just as, this is a good way, a beneficial way for everybody when the neighborhood operates like this, and so we just want to welcome you to the neighborhood and bring you the pie... So many neighborhoods don't do that. Like the other night, Michael was over at our house, and that storm came up, and I called over to his house, and his dad was not home. His dad had said, could you watch Michael for a little bit, I have to run an errand.

His dad got stuck in a flood situation. I said, I'll keep Michael here until I hear from you. That was fine. It was kind of late when his dad finally got home, and he was so grateful. I said, well, yes, be grateful, but you'll do the same for me someday. It requires good communication. There's a lot of variety within that neighborhood as well. We have some Hispanic families, we have some mixed race couples. I like it a lot.

AP: Has the neighborhood been accepting of that, too?

LG: Yes. Actually, this was sort of funny. There's a couple, Marty, who's the wife, who I know best, and her husband, Freddy, who's Hispanic. They were thinking about moving to Zeeland so they could get away from all the people moving in, all the aliens moving in, and what they were doing, getting mixed race couples and stuff like that. John VanOortwick looked at him and said, "Freddy, you think you're moving to Zeeland? Look at yourself." "Oh, well, you know what I mean." Hello, Freddy. What do you mean by mixed race? I think we're all human beings. It's a good neighborhood. We have a variety of people. There's one couple there. Mary is desperately sort of trying to reach out. When we moved in next door to Mary, she's a funny character, gosh, I like her, she's got a heart of gold. But she's also one of these people, she looked at the chair the Bill Mayer gave Molly and Jake. It's kind of crooked. It's a dancing chair, it's got motion to it, it's very kinetic. It's got a little leg sticking out and it's got a tilt, and the seat is tilted. She looked at the chair and she looked at it, she tilted her head side to side, she goes, "Why isn't that chair straight? I don't know why it isn't, but it sort of bugs me that it's not straight."

Then she looked at it more and more, and after a while she came back, "I guess I don't mind so much that it's not straight." Mary's one of these people who comes to every dance concert, every dance event that goes on, she comes. She says, "I don't know why. I don't pretend to understand this. All I know is I walk in, and when I walk out, I feel better. Even if I didn't understand it, even if I cried when I did understand it, I feel better when I walk out, so I'll keep going. I love it. I don't know why I love it. And Victor is just baffled." Victor's her husband. So you have a lot of variety in the neighborhood. Victor's sort of a Michigan Militia wanna-be. But he's OK. Victor's alright, too. He just gets on these kicks sometimes. Again, it's as it should be, no neighborhood should be the same. Thank heavens there's none of the keeping up with the VanderJones' concept in the neighborhood. The house we bought is three houses away from the house we lived at. It's been a good purchase, up until the septic failure. That's OK. It's still a good purchase. Triple lot, the house has so much potential, which I hope to realize within my life time. It's a great neighborhood, I love my neighborhood. Molly and Jake told me that, because I was kind of starting to look at houses to buy, Molly said, "If we move out of this neighborhood, I'm running away, I'll live with Ruth." The kids are on the same T-ball teams and soccer teams. There's a lot of good support with in our little community. I like it.

AP: How has the religious atmosphere of Holland affected you?

LG: In some respects, I don't know if I would have been as spiritually thought provoked in another place. I don't think my spirituality and my faith may have been questioned

elsewhere. Here, although people may not directly question me, so many issues arise around religion, so I find myself asking myself questions. Which I think is good, it's strengthening. Molly, Jake, and I joined Hope Church at that traumatic time in our lives when I knew and I recognized--when you're in situations like that, you are financially depleted, emotionally depleted, mentally depleted, and spiritually depleted. I knew that in order to renew myself, I needed to seek out a community to help that. I knew that my children would need that, too. It was very important for me to find one that had intelligence within the congregation. Education within the congregation, tolerance, which is a tough one to find around here. A certain open-mindedness, questioning, as well as a grounding in tradition. When you look at me, talk to me, I'm a product of my tradition and my upbringing, which is very traditional, as well as my education, and then my personal life experience, my travels. I have found that when I'm in trouble, I fall back on that tradition a lot, for better or for worse. I also found that my instincts are grounded in my upbringing, which is very traditional. They have never been wrong. My instincts got clouded over for a long time, and I have spent the last few years trying to get back in touch with my instincts, and within that, my tradition, there's a real strength to that. Knowing who you are also means knowing where you came from. So I was looking for a church that shared some of that tradition, my tradition, which is an inheritance. My children our inheriting just by the fact that I'm their mother. Also knowing that their father removed himself from their lives, at least for the time being, they need to have what tradition they do have strengthened. They're going to be kind of missing his tradition, that's a hole for

them, which at some point in their future, they will probably seek out to better understand themselves. But for them to have some center to their lives, they need to understand a tradition, even though they cannot conceptualize that, but to feel the strength of that, not just from their mother, but from the community. So I started looking for churches, and I kind of immediately went to Hope Church because I am friends with Dennis, who is the pastor there. I also know the people that I hang out with here, all go there. There's a variety of people within that, which denoted to me the tolerance range of the church and that the church itself is going to be wrestling with big questions because of that range. That, to me, is a strength. So I went to Hope Church and they've been very supportive. It's been a very good move for us. I like going to church. It helped my spiritual depletion, along with everything else. That's how I found a church. Curiously enough, when I went there, I think it was our last member orientation class, he talked about the history of the church, and how Hope Church started when Hope College brought in all these faculty from various places, and the faculty didn't have a place to worship, so they started Hope Church. The president is a member, Maxine is a member. I did not know that when I joined. I went there and I thought, this, to me, supports my reasons for being here. I laughed. I had gone to a few other churches, I dragged the kids around, and it wasn't working. Hope is, curiously enough, very traditional and very liberal.

AP: What has it been like being a single mom.

LG: Oh my gosh. It's been easier than being a married mom. At the time of our separation and after the divorce, the only thing that I'm doing now that I wasn't doing

before, is emptying the garbage. And I have one less child to take care of. I have control over the finances and the general direction the family takes, without being in a constant wrestling match with somebody else about that. Which, I think, is something to note for anybody... (tape ends) ...to find out if... The other person might talk a good line, but long term, do you share...? I know finances sounds like such an awful thing--so many people say "It's only money." Yes, it's only money. But how you earn it, how you spend it, is a reflection of your basic ethics and values. My ex went through 19 cars in seven years. This was an obsession. When he became unemployed, he found it impossible to go seek a job within the regular way. He had to have his own business. That was why he was unemployed, because he couldn't get his own business started. But the money thing, how you earn it, how you spend it, the choices you make with it, are a reflection of those values. It has to be looked at pretty closely. It's not "only money." Being a single mom has its pros and cons. Obviously there are times when you wish there was this other person there, especially when you're sick. But like I said, even when I was a married mom, I could not ask that other person to help me. I mean, I did, but it didn't go anywhere. Which was just another level of frustration, because you have certain expectations when that other person is there. You have expectations for their role within the relationship, which are not, necessarily, unfair expectations, it's supposed to be a partnership, so there should be some expectations and limitations. When those expectations are not met for whatever reason... I mean, I wouldn't ask somebody who is sick to go up on stage and dance, the expectations have to be

reasonable. But when reasonable expectations are not met, and when reasonable limitations are not adhered to, and when I say limitations, I mean things like, when property tax bills are do, you pay them, you don't take the money and go buy a car. Reasonable limitations. Then you have to question what is going on. But, in the mean time, you're dealing with great frustration. That leads to depression. I went through a period of depression, no question. Actually, being a single mom is much easier than being a married mom. I can make the decisions for the family and nobody's going to say, "Don't do that." Bear in mind that I'm not a goddess, and I don't know always what's best. So when I do make decisions, I find myself seeking out the advice of my support system. I'll call this friend, I'll call that friend. I'll call this one who repairs car. Right now I'm looking at cars, so I called a friend who works on cars: is this a reasonable price for this, what would you recommend? I'll talk to a few other people, I'll talk to a few moms who have those mini-vans: what do you think of the mini-van compared to the wagon. So I sort of do this education thing. When it comes to discipline of the children, raising them, choices there, I try to do the best I can. There isn't that other person there to say, let's try it this way. I sometimes wish I had that. Again, I have the support system of that community. The moms and dads, we talk about various styles, and this worked and this didn't. So I don't have that one other person, but I do have a group of other people, who, literally, are participating in the raising of Molly and Jake, which I think is a good thing. Being a single mom. It's hard when it comes to work. A number of the moms in the neighborhood, I'd say about half of them don't work. They are stay

home moms. I shouldn't say they don't work, they work. They work very hard. A couple of the moms have six children. But they are at home. They don't have the outside balancing act that I have to go through. So I am always doing a balancing act. What I have done, is I've cut way, way back on what I do. One of the good things about going through a traumatic period is that it shakes your priorities out. You get them straight, because you have to. I have found that I'm happier, and the children are happier, which makes us all happier, when I don't do the extraneous stuff. A lot of people try to fill their lives with all their activities. Molly, Jake, and I need down time together, and it's down time. I'm talking about just time hanging out at the house, having a cook out in the back. Down time. Watching a movie together. Not put a movie on and then I go off to the compute and do work, which I do sometimes, but I sit down with them and watch a movie. Not that we have to go out, not that they're enrolled in all these classes. I enroll them in one, maximum two classes at any one point, so that they don't burn out, and I don't burn out. We need each other, and we need time with each other. That was the big priority that I learned. I would say that before the divorce, I probably was doing too much, I know I was. For a lot of reasons, too. There was a lot of frustration at home, so I was probably going out more.

AP: Do you think that being a kid today is a lot different than being a kid when you were a kid?

LG: Yes and no. Again, where we are, the neighborhood reminds me of my neighborhood. Not environmentally. We live in a woods by a lake. I grew up on

the prairies, flat land. Today it's much faster paced and the expectations are different. What I try to do a lot is try to keep the pace of the kids lives slower right now, so they can enjoy their childhood. I see a lot of people going at a pace that is much too fast. When you go so fast, you can't see anything, everything becomes a blur. That's not good.

AP: Switch gears. What has the artistic community here been like for you?

LG: I hang out with the Hope College artistic community, primarily. I also get stimulation when I go up to Blue Lake, which is a family friendly gig. I can take Molly and Jake with me. But there are people there out in the woods, in a cabin, who are from the Metropolitan Ballet, or the New Jersey Ballet. They may not be huge organizations, but they're good, and they've got a lot of integrity. So I get stimulation there. I try to get a couple of city fixes every year. We have to go to New York, and we hit Chicago. Last year I went to San Francisco for a week. I need those fixes. But, artistically speaking, thank heavens for Steven Iannaccone, thank heavens for Max. Billy Mayer. There's a couple of specific people, Perry Landes, who are always very good to work with. For myself, I just wish that I had, and I think in the future I will have this, a little more time to get out and stay current. I have a hard time doing that right now. The kids are small, and the time will come when I can do that again. So I'm not impatient about that. But I like the artistic community a lot.

AP: How has it been making the transition back to a small community and then producing art for that small community?

LG: I don't know if I produce it for them. They're certainly the audience, so you bear that in mind. I wouldn't necessarily produce the kind of work here that I would in New York, or even Seattle. But, I think, as an artist, no matter where you are, you have to bear your community in mind. You don't want to turn your audience off. You want to challenge your audience. But you also have to maintain a certain accessibility to that audience. Otherwise, they're left going, "Huh?" And you've lost your audience. You don't want that to happen, either. If you're building an audience, there's always that line of education that's incorporated.

AP: How have you managed to build a dance audience? What challenges do you run into? When I talk to people about the artistic community here, the things they always mention are films in the Knickerbocker and the Aerial Dance Company. So that's something that is a very integrated part of the community now that people are used to have.

LG: Wow. I wish more people would show up. So much of what you produce as an artist, you don't want it to be blatantly auto-biographical, but it's auto-biographical. It's inevitably auto-biographical, it's based on your experiences. So much of my experience right now is focused around this community. Motherhood. I think in my heart, I'm a happy person. Somebody said that about my choreography once. This was out in Los Angeles. They looked at my stuff, and there were some heavy angst pieces, and people tearing off their clothes, and Holocaust and all this other stuff going on. My piece came out, and _____, who's the director of the North Carolina Dance Theater, was the choreography director, and he watched it and

he smiled and said, "You know, that was a work created by a healthy person. You really have a funny, clever, healthy perspective on life." I don't know if that's always true. I don't think it is, because I've certainly produced other kinds of works, too. Anything you do is a reflection of where you are and what's going on in your life. Where I seem to have good success, results, is when I take a very, very, very little thing, and just play with it. When you play with it, you find that which is extraordinary. So I don't know if my pieces about war will necessarily be the most successful in the eyes of an audience. People like to be entertained. Every member of the artistic community likes to be entertained. To do works that bring to light that which is extraordinary to our every day lives, lends a certain appreciation to it. But it has to be done with artistic integrity. Of all the works I've done, Chair Study probably does that best. Leanlook is fun, but it went into the realm of relationship in it, which was fun, too. But I have other pieces, I think, that are questioning and have some depth to them, like Do You Hear the Angel's Wings and Of Being explore more disturbing areas, I hope effectively. But for me, I have to take off a little teeny bite, and then just chew it to death, and then it works well. Oh well. We have to end.

AP: Thank you.